

## **Part 421.4 INVENTORY OF HOUSING RESOURCES**

### **4-1 UNSUBSIDIZED LOW/MODERATE INCOME HOUSING**

#### **4-1-1 Affordable Housing in the Private Housing Market**

There were a large number of Rhode Island homes available for sale to moderate-income households in 1998, according to a R.I. Association of Realtors State-Wide Multiple Listing Service survey ((1)). The survey found over 1,600 single-family homes for sale for under \$100,000, and 2,700 for under \$125,000. Mortgage rates averaged 33 percent less than they were in 1990 for similar sized homes. In fact, mortgage rates in 1998 were the lowest in five years.

While the housing market for unsubsidized moderate-income households that own or are able to purchase homes has substantially improved since 1990, low-income households have not fared as well. The total vacancy rate for all types of units increased from 8.8 percent in 1990 to approximately 11.7 percent in 1995, but many vacancies were for seasonal units, long-term vacancies (units being held off the market), uninhabitable units, or units being rented or sold at amounts low-income households could not afford.

It is estimated (Appendix A-12) that there were 48,766 vacant units in Rhode Island in 1995. Approximately 4,535 of these units were available for immediate sale, and 17,409 were for rent. About 25,865 of these vacant units were single (detached), 21,772 were in multi-family complexes, 600 were mobile/manufactured homes, and 529 were considered "other" types of housing (see Appendices A-4, 5, 6, & 7).

#### **4-1-2 Single Room Occupancy Housing**

Single room occupancy units are unique housing resources that have dwindled in recent years as several Rhode Island YMCAs discontinued providing such rentals and as many former rooming houses were torn down to make way for redevelopment or were converted to other purposes. This reduction ran directly counter to a corresponding demographic shift in the decreasing number of people per housing unit.

In 1970, there were 3.07 persons on average residing in each Rhode Island housing unit. By 1990, this count had slipped to only 2.55 persons per unit. As is the case in the rest of the nation, household size in Rhode Island continues to shrink (see previous Table 421-3(09) and this has resulted in an increased number of single person households. The U.S. Census reported 2,300 lodgers occupying single rooms in Rhode Island in 1990. Of this number, 1,600 (70 percent) reported that they had moved during the previous year, indicative of an extraordinary degree of mobility among this population.

Most consumers of single room occupancy quarters are single low-income individuals. The Rhode Island Food and Shelter Board reported that the percentage of single individuals using shelter services for the homeless increased from 83 percent of the clientele in FY 1996 to 87 percent in 1998 ((8)). This population clearly has a significant need of long term single room occupancy rental units.

## **4-2 FEDERAL AND STATE ASSISTED HOUSING**

America's longstanding goal of "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family" had its origins in the *Housing Act of 1949*. Subsequent housing law has echoed that sentiment, and billions of dollars in federal support have been appropriated to make that pledge a reality for those who need help to acquire housing. While a large portion of federal assistance has been used to subsidize the purchase of individual housing units, this plan is mainly concerned with rental housing supply and demand and the status of federal and state rental supports for low/moderate-income households.

### **4-2-1 Federally Assisted Housing**

Each year Congress appropriates funds for a fixed number of new federally assisted housing commitments. When funds are made available, they can run from two years to as many as fifty years, so each new commitment of funds obligates spending for years into the future. For this reason, programs thought to be inactive may in fact be continuing to serve large numbers of people. More than half of all currently available subsidies were funded over the past 20 years. But new authorizations have been on a downward curve. Back in the early 1980s, as many as 400,000 new families in the U.S. were served each year; that was reduced to 40,000 by the end of the decade, and the President's 1996 budget asked for none. And while the nation enjoys high employment and general prosperity, wages of low-income workers have stagnated, and gentrification has reduced the numbers of affordable available apartments.

### **The 1990 Cranston-Gonzales National Affordable Housing Act**

As result of the 1990 Housing Act, block grants are now provided to state and local governments to fund housing assistance activities. Various approaches are used. All share the overall objective of improving the quality and/or lowering the costs of housing for families who cannot afford units without assistance. Related goals are promoting residential construction, expanding opportunities for disadvantaged groups and those with special needs, promoting neighborhood revitalization, and increasing self-sufficiency among the poor.

The three major categories of assistance authorized through this 1990 act are the HOME Investment Partnerships Block Grant Program, the Home Ownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE) Program, and the National Home Ownership Trust Demonstration. At present, HOME is the only program receiving an appropriation.

The HOME Program provides grants to state and local governments to increase the supply of affordable housing. These funds can be used for a variety of purposes at local discretion. Among the possible uses are tenant-based rental assistance and acquisition and rehabilitation or construction of rental or ownership housing. A matching local share of 25 percent is required. In Rhode Island in 1997, 26 projects were funded via HOME at a cost of \$3.3 million. The intended result was 508 affordable rental housing units and 41 units produced for ownership.

Production of new rental units has given way in recent years to issuing the less costly Section 8 and voucher programs. As of 1995, there were 7,109 certificates and vouchers in use in Rhode Island, 78.3 percent of which were for families, with the balance reserved for the elderly.

## **Project Based Assistance**

The most traditional form of federal housing aid is a subsidy to underwrite the rental costs of lower income families. There are two primary methods for conveying this aid. Project-based aid creates new construction or provides for rehabilitation of existing structures; while household subsidies empower renters to occupy privately owned standard housing units. Rental assistance reduces the amount that tenants pay to no more than 30 percent of their cash income, with the subsidy making up the difference. These subsidies have never been made available as an entitlement to all who are eligible. An estimated 15 million households nationally qualify for federal housing assistance, but only 4.5 million actually receive it. In most areas the waiting lists are periodically closed down because the demand is so great.

Project-based aid is tied to housing production. Significant HUD categorical grant-in-aid production emanates from the Public Housing Program and the Section 8 New Construction & Substantial Rehabilitation Program. There is also the Section 515 Mortgage Interest Program, offered by the Rural Housing Service under the U.S. Department of Agriculture. As of 1998, Rhode Island had 13 housing complexes with 417 subsidized units under the Section 515 Program.

Two prior sources for project development were the Housing Development Program (HoDAG) and the Rental Rehabilitation Block Grant Program. While HoDAG has received no appropriation since 1987, recipients had to guarantee occupancy for lower-income tenants for 20 years. This is an example of how projects no longer receiving financial support for additional units can continue to have an impact years later. Additional project-based aid is made available through the Section 8 Existing housing program.

## **Household Based Assistance**

Household-based subsidies are channeled through two related components of the Section 8 Existing Housing program, rental certificates and rental vouchers. These subsidies help eligible householders obtain standard units from the existing housing stock. The difference between the two programs is that rental certificates are limited to units whose rents are within “fair-market rent” guidelines established annually by HUD. Voucher recipients can occupy units regardless of rental level, provided they pay the difference between the voucher amount and the actual rent. Statistical information on these programs and the Moderate Rehabilitation Program can be found under Table 421-4(01).

**Table 421-4(01)**  
**RENTAL SUBSIDIES: SECTION 8 CERTIFICATE, VOUCHER AND MODERATE REHABILITATION**  
**PROGRAMS RHODE ISLAND: 1995**

City/Town	Certificates*		Vouchers*		Moderate Rehab.	
	Leased to Families	Leased to Elderly	Leased to Families	Leased to Elderly	Leased to Families	Leased to Elderly
Barrington	10	1	3	---	---	---
Bristol	97	32	40	17	---	---
Burrillville	33	12	17	7	---	---
Central Falls	226	35	27	6	76	11
Charlestown	3	2	2	---	---	---
Coventry	81	47	41	9	---	---
Cranston	129	63	6	1	12	---
Cumberland	74	27	49	6	34	7
East Greenwich	119	33	73	13	35	9
East Providence	116	51	24	---	---	---
Exeter	5	1	2	---	---	---
Foster	4	2	1	---	---	---
Glocester	6	---	---	---	---	---
Hopkinton	21	5	2	---	---	---
Jamestown	15	3	1	---	---	---
Johnston	106	30	19	1	---	---
Lincoln	85	19	8	12	---	---
Little Compton	1	---	1	---	---	---
Middletown	62	7	16	2	---	---
Narragansett	66	26	42	7	---	---
Newport	284	36	61	9	74	3
New Shoreham	---	---	---	---	---	---
North Kingstown	52	6	9	1	---	---
North Providence	89	30	10	10	---	---
North Smithfield	7	5	1	2	---	---
Pawtucket	450	105	47	3	---	---
Portsmouth	32	23	19	6	---	---
Providence	863	172	569	50	256	134
Richmond	5	4	---	---	---	---
Scituate	9	5	3	---	---	---
Smithfield	26	13	12	2	---	---
South Kingstown	41	17	22	8	---	---
Tiverton	44	7	---	---	---	---
Warren	97	46	31	8	4	13
Warwick	221	71	37	6	6	1
Westerly	89	47	60	2	---	---
West Greenwich	4	1	2	---	---	---
West Warwick	41	31	21	4	---	---
Woonsocket	88	110	63	36	30	7
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>3,701</b>	<b>1,125</b>	<b>1,341</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>527</b>	<b>187</b>

\*Counts were taken in February, 1995. There were 80 Certificates and 25 Vouchers that could not be identified by household type or by city or town and therefore were not included in the state totals.

**Sources:** Housing and Urban Development, R.I. Housing and R.I. Statewide Planning

## **Community Development Funding**

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds are distributed via formula to local governments for housing and other allowable activities. In FY 1997, Rhode Island received \$20.5 million in CDBG funds. The six “entitlement” communities received 70 percent: Providence, \$7.7 million; Pawtucket, \$2.6 million; Woonsocket, \$1.6 million; Cranston, \$1.2 million; East Providence, \$0.8 million; and Warwick, \$0.8 million. Non-entitlement communities (50,000 people or less) competed for a pool of \$5.7 million administered by the state. In FY 1997, 45 percent of all non-entitlement funds were used for housing, 28 percent for rehabilitation, 13 percent for housing development, and 4 percent for down payment assistance.

## **Expiring Section 8 Projects and Federally Insured Mortgage Repayments**

The availability of subsidized housing will almost certainly be impacted by the status of expiring Section 8 projects. Developers who have been given long-term subsidies in return for holding rents to 30 percent of their tenants’ incomes own these projects. Owners of these have long-term contracts with HUD, but many are slated to expire in the next few years and some may choose not to renew. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that HUD has capped subsidies and is now employing one-year contracts, less attractive circumstances than had been the case previously.

A related problem is the end of “the preservation program,” a federal law that prohibited owners from paying off federally insured mortgages early to escape rent restrictions embodied in the mortgages. Congress restored the rights of owners to prepay in 1996, and certain financial incentives that encouraged owners to remain in the preservation program were eliminated at the same time. According to Rhode Island Housing, many of the state's elderly and family subsidized units are at risk of discontinuance.

## **Prospects for Future Support**

Federal support for new and existing housing in New England has been shrinking since 1994. Part of this is because project-based HUD programs that tended to isolate poor people in dangerous inner-city housing projects have fallen into disfavor with Congress.

According to a 1998 report published by the New England Housing Network, funding for new and existing public housing in New England fell by 14 percent from 1994 to 1996. The same report went on to say that although Rhode Island rents had been relatively flat, increasing by only 1 or 2 percent a year, more than 9,300 households were on waiting lists for subsidized housing as of December 1996. This was an 18 percent increase from just two years before. There was an average wait of 2½ years for elderly and disabled people and four years for other eligible households.

### **4-2-2 State Assisted Housing**

Two federal programs are key to empowering the state to add to the supply of low-income and moderate income housing stock. They are the Mortgage Revenue Bonding authority and the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) programs. These two programs allow Rhode Island Housing to issue state-level, tax-free bonds, the proceeds of which are then used to finance housing for individuals and families who would otherwise be unable to afford it. Tax credits account for nearly all apartment construction in Rhode Island. In 1995, \$4.1 million in tax credits was allocated toward the development of 968 units. The state does have some other

modest sources for affordable rental housing, but they are dwarfed by the larger resources of Rhode Island Housing.

One state program came into place during 1988 in response to the statewide housing shortage of the mid-1980s. Known simply as the State Rental Subsidy Program, it provides a small number of development-based subsidies to residents. As in the federal Section 8 program, renters are required to pay no more than 30 percent of their income for rent. The rest of their rent is borne by the program subsidy, which is guaranteed for 20 years. The key feature of this program is that participating developers were assured of a 20-year tenant subsidy, on the condition that they agreed to insert an affordable housing restriction in their deeds. While the program began in 1988, construction continued to 1991, so this resource is assured well into the future. In fiscal year 1998 this state program subsidized 670 units in 22 different developments at a cost of about \$4 million. Most of these developments are located in the metropolitan areas of the state.

Administrative responsibilities for the State Rental Subsidy Program were transferred to Rhode Island housing in 1991; all financial obligations were (temporarily) transferred in 1994. Legislation enacted in 1998 gives the newly established Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission authority to assume administrative and fiscal responsibilities for this rental program.

Another stimulus to low and moderate-income housing development is a requirement in the state's Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (RIGL 45-53-1) where a 10 percent benchmark has been established for each town's fair share of low-income housing. The act defines low or moderate-income housing as:

...any housing subsidized by the federal or state government under any program to assist the construction or rehabilitation of low or moderate income housing, as defined by federal or state statute, whether built or operated by any public agency or non profit organization, or by any limited equity housing cooperative or any private developer

According to the 1997 listing (Table 421-4(02)) that established the percentage of low-income housing in each community, only six cities achieved the threshold amount of 10 percent affordability and were therefore not subject to the appellate authority of the State Zoning Board of Review. The act was amended in 1998 to exempt cities and towns with at least 5,000 occupied rental units, when those rental units comprise 25 percent or more of the city or town housing stock. This added four more communities in the 1999 listing to the six that were exempt on the basis of the previous threshold formula. While the board has considered only a handful of cases since its inception, it is widely believed that its mere presence serves to make local zoning decisions less arbitrary and more supportive of siting affordable housing.

Table 421-4(02)

**PERCENTAGE COUNTS OF LOW AND MODERATE INCOME ASSISTED HOUSING IN  
RHODE ISLAND, BY CITY AND TOWN: 1993, 1995, 1997 AND 1999**

City/Town	Low and Moderate Income Assisted Housing, as a percentage of all housing			
	1993	1995	1997	1999
Barrington	0.10%	0.57%	1.60%	1.60%
Bristol	2.94	3.93	4.07	4.16
Burrillville	6.78	6.97	7.25	7.25
Central Falls	12.70	12.80	13.17	13.29
Charlestown	0.09	1.01	1.01	1.01
Coventry	4.03	4.32	4.35	4.35
Cranston	5.12	5.41	5.57	5.57
Cumberland	5.08	5.38	5.38	5.39
East Greenwich	3.73	4.61	4.80	5.55
East Providence	10.56	11.14	11.04	11.04
Exeter	0.16	1.25	1.25	1.25
Foster	2.10	2.69	2.69	2.69
Glocester	1.21	2.08	2.08	2.08
Hopkinton	5.18	5.75	5.75	5.75
Jamestown	2.74	3.26	4.05	4.05
Johnston	6.82	7.29	7.27	7.38
Lincoln	6.61	7.66	7.58	7.58
Little Compton	---	---	0.00	0.00
Middletown	8.19	9.01	10.01	10.04
Narragansett	2.17	2.35	2.78	2.78
Newport	15.10	15.76	16.05	16.08
New Shoreham	1.27	1.27	1.27	1.27
North Kingstown	7.42	8.37	8.27	8.58
North Providence	6.74	8.16	8.39	8.46
North Smithfield	4.62	6.78	6.78	6.78
Pawtucket	7.90	8.19	8.13	8.19
Portsmouth	1.56	1.87	1.87	1.87
Providence	11.48	11.98	12.08	12.33
Richmond	0.21	1.81	1.81	1.81
Scituate	0.77	0.99	0.99	0.99
Smithfield	3.92	4.66	4.50	4.50
South Kingstown	4.20	4.76	5.00	5.48
Tiverton	0.88	1.60	2.03	2.03
Warren	3.64	3.99	4.16	4.30
Warwick	4.72	4.86	4.89	4.91
Westerly	4.03	4.65	4.55	4.93
West Greenwich	---	0.44	0.44	0.44
West Warwick	6.58	7.42	7.48	7.48
Woonsocket	16.29	16.69	16.98	17.04
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>7.17</b>	<b>7.69</b>	<b>7.81</b>	<b>7.91</b>

Note: Buildings were counted in 1993. Group Home beds were counted starting in 1995.

Substance Abuse and Children's Services counts were included if related to "long -term" residencies.

Counts do not include transportable Sec. 8 Certificates/Vouchers.

Source: R.I. Housing

### 4-2-3 Inventory of Assisted Housing In Rhode Island

The state has collected data on the distribution of federally subsidized housing in Rhode Island since 1970. The first year there were only 10 such developments and 1,278 units in the entire state. By 1995 this had grown by almost thirty times, to 314 developments with 29,498 units.

The state's federal rent-subsidized housing inventory is significant. Including vouchers and certificates, it adds up to 6.4 percent of the state's entire housing inventory and 17.7 percent of the state's rental stock. However, the state's assisted housing inventory is significantly less than what would be required to serve the state's low-income population. Of the state's 18,800 welfare households, only 27 percent live in subsidized rental units.

Federally assisted housing programs offer construction and mortgage loan subsidies, as well as low mortgage insurance rates in order to reduce the overall cost of new construction and/or substantial rehabilitation. These savings are then passed through to eligible low and moderate-income occupants by affecting limitations on the rent that can be charged. Assisted units (Table 421-4(03)) have rental burdens for tenants that are substantially less than the private housing market.

Rhode Island's assisted developments receive direct rent subsidies for the great majority of their units, and many are able to accept tenants with private market Section 8 vouchers or certificates from local public housing authorities (PHAs). Distribution of the 27,073 rent-subsidized units in 1995 are shown in the last column of the aforementioned table.

In addition to privately held federally assisted housing, the counts shown in Table 421-4(04) include public housing facilities owned and managed by local government. In 1995 there were 10,159 public housing units in the state, 3,682 for families and 6,447 for the elderly. Twenty-five cities and towns offered elderly public housing at that time, and 12 had both elderly and family housing.

Assisted units are most prevalent in the Metropolitan core, where 56.3 percent of all such units could be found in 1995. Another 15.2 percent were in Northern Rhode Island. West Bay and East Bay followed with 11.1 percent and 10.5 percent, respectively. Western Rhode Island had the least amount of assisted housing, with only 1.2 percent of the state's family units and 3.4 percent of the elderly/handicapped inventory. Two of the six communities that contained no subsidized developments (Exeter and West Greenwich) were in the Western Rhode Island housing market.

Most assisted housing apartments (65.2 percent) were reserved for the elderly and persons with disabilities in 1995. Family units were more commonplace in central cities and urban areas. Nineteen, mostly rural communities had no family housing, and five of these (Exeter, West Greenwich, Charlestown, Richmond, and Little Compton) had neither family nor elderly/handicapped housing.



**Table 421-4(03)**  
**ASSISTED DEVELOPMENTS IN RHODE ISLAND: 1995**

<b>Housing Market Area City/Town</b>	<b>Elderly/ Handicap Units</b>	<b>Family Units</b>	<b>Total Units*</b>	<b>Total Developments**</b>	<b>With Rent Subsidies</b>
<b><i>Metropolitan Core</i></b>	10,849	5,767	16,616	163	15,560
Central Falls	617	193	810	11	810
Cranston	1,306	189	1,495	14	1,495
E. Providence	1,403	797	2,200	19	1,903
Johnston	624	103	727	10	727
No. Providence	929	200	1,129	17	949
Pawtucket	1,730	648	2,378	21	2,377
Providence	4,240	3,637	7,877	71	7,299
<b><i>Northern RI</i></b>	2,836	1,641	4,477	50	4,082
Cumberland	519	0	519	5	519
Lincoln	366	108	474	7	469
No. Smithfield	215	0	215	4	205
Smithfield	380	0	380	4	244
Woonsocket	1,356	1,533	2,889	30	2,645
<b><i>Western RI</i></b>	657	119	776	13	707
Burrillville	189	0	189	3	189
Coventry	352	119	471	6	402
Exeter	0	0	0	0	0
Foster	30	0	30	1	30
Glocester	62	0	62	2	62
Scituate	24	0	24	1	24
W. Greenwich	0	0	0	0	0
<b><i>West Bay</i></b>	2,684	602	3,286	35	3,133
East Greenwich	106	28	134	3	134
North Kingstown	375	318	693	6	541
Warwick	1,603	36	1,639	18	1,639
W. Warwick	599	220	819	8	819
<b><i>Southern RI</i></b>	973	262	1,235	23	1,015
Charlestown	0	0	0	0	0
Hopkinton	137	0	137	3	137
Narragansett	108	156	264	7	176
New Shoreham	0	16	16	1	16
Richmond	0	0	0	0	0
So. Kingstown	369	52	421	7	297
Westerly	359	38	397	5	389
<b><i>East Bay</i></b>	1,307	1,801	3,108	30	2,576
Barrington	0	0	0	0	0
Bristol	331	0	331	5	331
Jamestown	47	0	47	2	47
Little Compton	0	0	0	0	0
Middletown	163	299	462	3	130
Newport	458	1,502	1,960	16	1,760
Portsmouth	110	0	110	2	110
Tiverton	45	0	45	1	45
Warren	153	0	153	1	153
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	19,306	10,192	29,498	314	27,073

\* Subsidized and Unsubsidized Rental Units

\*\* PHA "Scattered Site Housing" is listed under developments as a single group entity according to occupancy data.

**Source:** RI Statewide Planning

**Table 421-4(04)**  
**FEDERAL RENT SUBSIDIES BY LOCATION AND TYPE: 1995\***

Housing Market Area City/Town	ELDERLY			FAMILY			GRAND TOTAL
	Section 8 & Rental Asst.	Public Housing	Total Elderly	Section 8 & Rental Asst.	Public Housing	Total Family	All Rent Subsidy Units
<b>Metropolitan Core</b>	7,274	3,422	10,696	2,787	2,077	4,864	15,560
Central Falls	288	329	617	193	0	193	810
Cranston	707	599	1,306	168	21	189	1,495
E. Providence	888	410	1,298	555	50	605	1,903
Johnston	474	150	624	62	41	103	727
No. Providence	791	138	929	0	20	20	949
Pawtucket	1,074	655	1,729	192	456	648	2,377
Providence	3,052	1,141	4,193	1,617	1,489	3,106	7,299
<b>Northern RI</b>	1,548	1,133	2,681	744	657	1,401	4,082
Cumberland	343	176	519	0	0	0	519
Lincoln	120	246	366	97	6	103	469
No. Smithfield	205	0	205	0	0	0	205
Smithfield	194	50	244	0	0	0	244
Woonsocket	686	661	1,347	647	651	1,298	2,645
<b>Western RI</b>	386	271	657	50	0	50	707
Burrillville	113	76	189	0	0	0	189
Coventry	157	195	352	50	0	50	402
Exeter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foster	30	0	30	0	0	0	30
Glocester	62	0	62	0	0	0	62
Scituate	24	0	24	0	0	0	24
W. Greenwich	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>West Bay</b>	1,854	733	2,587	498	48	546	3,133
East Greenwich	106	0	106	16	12	28	134
North Kingstown	279	0	279	262	0	262	541
Warwick	1,120	483	1,603	0	36	36	1,639
West Warwick	349	250	599	220	0	220	819
<b>Southern RI</b>	739	110	849	102	64	166	1015
Charlestown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hopkinton	137	0	137	0	0	0	137
Narragansett	108	0	108	56	12	68	176
New Shoreham	0	0	0	16	0	16	16
Richmond	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
So. Kingstown	245	0	245	0	52	52	297
Westerly	249	110	359	30	0	30	389
<b>East Bay</b>	346	808	1,154	586	836	1,422	2,576
Barrington	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bristol	111	220	331	0	0	0	331
Jamestown	0	47	47	0	0	0	47
Little Compton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Middletown	10	0	10	120	0	120	130
Newport	155	303	458	466	836	1,302	1,760
Portsmouth	70	40	110	0	0	0	110
Tiverton	0	45	45	0	0	0	45
Warren	0	153	153	0	0	0	153
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>12,147</b>	<b>6,477</b>	<b>18,624</b>	<b>4,767</b>	<b>3,682</b>	<b>8,449</b>	<b>27,073</b>

\*As applied to multifamily complexes

Source: R.I. Statewide Planning

#### **4-2-4 Other Housing Resources**

Private-sector and public-private entities have been instrumental in advancing the availability of affordable housing in Rhode Island. The state's affiliate of the national Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) began local operations in 1991 to provide financing, technical assistance and operational support to a number of community-based housing development operations. In Rhode Island, LISC has been financially supported via charitable contributions.

LISC was able to attract \$18 million in contributions in just the first six years of operation. This core support served to leverage an additional \$120 million in public and private investment. The LISC program deploys this seed money to attract additional investments. Development is locally controlled by community-based non-profits. More than 700 new or substantially rehabilitated affordable housing units throughout Rhode Island have come about as a result of this program.

There is also a federal law empowering the state to add to its supply of low-income housing called the Mortgage Revenue Bonding Authority. This law allows the state to issue state-level tax-free bonds, the proceeds of which are then used to finance housing for individuals and families who would otherwise be unable to afford it. The Mortgage Revenue Bonding Authority is the basic funding entity for Rhode Island Housing, which is the state's principal resource for housing development.

Rhode Island Housing provides \$12 million annually to subsidize programs for home buyers and renters and to prevent homelessness. In 1997, the Corporation spent \$2.3 million to help 1,053 Rhode Islanders buy homes. Since the program began, more than 50,000 first-time homeowners have been assisted. Renters benefit as well. In the course of its existence, Rhode Island Housing has financed 13,000 units of rental housing. An Emergency Housing Assistance Program has helped 7,545 households in danger of eviction and has enabled 5,750 homeless families and individuals to secure permanent housing.

Legislation to establish a new state housing commission was enacted by the General Assembly in 1998. The Rhode Island Housing Resources Act will provide coherence to the housing programs of the State of Rhode Island. The law created an executive agency that draws together elements of Rhode Island Housing and combines them with other state housing activities.

The duties of the new agency include establishing housing standards, promulgating regulations, and undertaking housing policy and planning. Responsibilities also include continuing housing-related programs currently scattered throughout several different agencies, such as Community Development (CDBG), Lead Abatement, Homeless Services, and the previously mentioned State Rental Assistance Program.

#### **4-3 INSTITUTIONAL AND NON-INSTITUTIONAL GROUP QUARTERS**

State and federal governments also provide housing resources for dependent populations. These resources are usually of an institutional nature. Some are non-institutional and intended for population groups with unique housing needs. Major consideration in this section has been given to those special population groups as defined under subsection 3-1-2. Other populations in group quarters should be considered in state or local studies whenever warranted.

Rhode Island had 38,595 individuals residing in institutional and non-institutional group quarters in 1990. That number has been projected to grow to 42,188 by the year 2000 (Appendix A-10). Institutional quarters are defined as correctional institutions and nursing homes; non-institutional group facilities are college dormitories, military quarters, and emergency and homeless shelter care. In 1990 there were 14,801 persons in institutional quarters and 23,794 persons in non-institutionalized facilities.

##### **4-3-1 Institutional Group Quarters**

Cranston has long been thought of as a city with a disproportionate share of people residing in-group quarters because of the Howard Center. In 1995 it was estimated (Table 421-4(05)) that Cranston's 5.7 percent group quarters population was exceeded in five communities: South Kingstown (17.7 percent), Smithfield (12.3 percent), Newport (10.2 percent), Bristol (8.6 percent), and Providence (8.5 percent).

Two state facilities -- The Eleanor Slater Hospital at the Howard Center in Cranston and the Zambarano unit in Burrillville have a total licensed capacity of 700 beds; but as of 1998 the combined census for both facilities was 450 patients.

An area of significant expansion is the prison population. As of April 1998 there was an all-time record population of 3,364 persons confined in the state-administered adult correctional institutions and an additional 163 persons in home confinement. That represents a 10 percent increase in just the last five years, exclusive of the federal and contracted prison population in the privately administered Wyatt detention center in Central Falls.

The combined populations of people in 1995 confined to institutions and those residing in group care facilities made up about 4 percent of the state's population. This count was little changed from that of 1990 (Table 421-4(05)).

**Table 421-4(05)**  
**PEOPLE IN RHODE ISLAND LIVING IN GROUP QUARTERS: 1990 AND 1995**

	1990				1995			
	Total	Percent*	Institutional	Other	Total	Percent*	Institutional	Other
<b>BARRINGTON</b>	311	2.0%	11	300	357	2.3%	0	357
<b>BRISTOL</b>	1,818	8.4	535	1,283	1,842	8.6	520	1,322
<b>BURRILLVILLE</b>	692	4.3	682	10	534	3.3	437	97
<b>CENTRAL FALLS</b>	372	2.1	360	12	735	4.2	712	23
<b>CHARLESTOWN</b>	7	0.1	7	0	40	0.6	0	40
<b>COVENTRY</b>	501	1.6	473	28	597	1.9	559	38
<b>CRANSTON</b>	3,763	4.9	3,620	143	4,318	5.7	4,074	244
<b>CUMBERLAND</b>	218	0.8	111	107	301	1.0	202	99
<b>EAST GREENWICH</b>	118	1.0	118	0	98	0.8	55	43
<b>EAST PROVIDENCE</b>	942	1.9	850	92	1,158	2.3	996	162
<b>EXETER</b>	340	6.2	148	192	164	3.0	100	64
<b>FOSTER</b>	18	0.4	18	0	31	0.7	20	11
<b>GLOCESTER</b>	46	0.5	46	0	10	0.1	0	10
<b>HOPKINTON</b>	6	0.1	0	6	16	0.2	0	16
<b>JAMESTOWN</b>	12	0.2	0	12	12	0.2	0	12
<b>JOHNSTON</b>	425	1.6	415	10	485	1.8	420	65
<b>LINCOLN</b>	144	0.8	133	11	210	1.2	170	40
<b>LITTLE COMPTON</b>	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0	0	0
<b>MIDDLETOWN</b>	1,993	10.2	310	1,683	572	3.0	330	242
<b>NARRAGANSETT</b>	60	0.4	25	35	90	0.6	29	61
<b>NEWPORT</b>	2,346	8.3	235	2,111	2,855	10.2	241	2,614
<b>NEW SHOREHAM</b>	14	1.7	0	14	0	0.0	0	0
<b>NO. KINGSTOWN</b>	332	1.4	321	11	424	1.8	353	71
<b>NO. PROVIDENCE</b>	541	1.7	434	107	448	1.4	381	67
<b>NO. SMITHFIELD</b>	290	2.8	279	11	353	3.4	308	45
<b>PAWTUCKET</b>	610	0.8	525	85	598	0.8	435	163
<b>PORTSMOUTH</b>	19	0.1	0	19	45	0.3	8	37
<b>PROVIDENCE</b>	12,001	7.5	2,354	9,647	13,532	8.5	2,064	11,468
<b>RICHMOND</b>	0	0.0	0	0	50	0.9	0	50
<b>SCITUATE</b>	54	0.6	54	0	57	0.6	46	11
<b>SMITHFIELD</b>	2,677	14.0	460	2,217	2,349	12.3	459	1,890
<b>SO. KINGSTOWN</b>	5,254	21.3	173	5,081	4,330	17.7	227	4,103
<b>TIVERTON</b>	15	0.1	0	15	43	0.3	0	43
<b>WARREN</b>	287	2.5	247	40	272	2.4	242	30
<b>WARWICK</b>	1,124	1.3	817	307	1,115	1.3	762	353
<b>WESTERLY</b>	256	1.2	244	12	303	1.4	232	71
<b>WEST GREENWICH</b>	26	0.7	0	26	67	1.9	0	67
<b>WEST WARWICK</b>	183	0.6	125	58	154	0.5	128	26
<b>WOONSOCKET</b>	780	1.8	671	109	1,021	2.3	847	174
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>38,595</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>14,801</b>	<b>23,794</b>	<b>39,586</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>15,357</b>	<b>24,229</b>

\* Percent of total local and State population (1990) and estimated population (1995) living in group quarters.

**Source:** 1990 Census and 1995 Rhode Island Statewide Planning surveys and projections.

### **4-3-2 Non-Institutional Group Quarters**

#### **Community Residences**

More than twenty years ago, a series of significant federal and state policy decisions initiated a more humane treatment approach for various population groups that had long been detained in large, centrally located, and often impersonal institutional settings. That process, commonly called de-institutionalization, led to the dismantling of large state institutions in favor of smaller, more home-like community-based facilities. New categories of subsidized housing called community residences came into being.

Rhode Island has succeeded in developing community-based residences for a large percentage of its citizens who can benefit from such services. As of 1995 (see Table 421-4(06)), the last year for which data was available, 311 separate residences, housing 2,336 persons, were located throughout the State (except in Little Compton and New Shoreham).

These supervised group homes, apartments, and multi-unit complexes are more akin to conventional living arrangements for the special populations they house, which include the mentally or physically impaired, substance abusers requiring inpatient treatment services, and children who cannot remain in their own homes. Specific housing arrangements differ in accordance with the needs of the special population groups, such as the supervision and supportive services that are required.

Initial resistance to the siting of such facilities marked the early years of de-institutionalization, as some suburbanites feared an increase in crime or an adverse effect on property values. These fears proved generally unfounded, and there seems to be more acceptance for such facilities now. With the passage of the Rhode Island Zoning Enabling Act in 1991, community residences cannot be excluded in any residential, commercial, or industrial districts except where such uses might be prohibited for public health or safety reasons. All community residences operate under the aegis of one or more state agencies.

#### **Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals (MHRH)**

The Division of Integrated Mental Health Services in MHRH provides community based residential services to its clients, all of whom are characterized by some mental disability or dysfunction. Services are available to clients residing in congregate living arrangements (group homes) or clustered apartment units, as well as the more structured facilities.

A Mental Health Psychiatric Rehabilitative Residence (MHPRR) is a licensed residential program with no more than sixteen beds, staffed around the clock to provide treatment, psychiatric rehabilitation, and individual care services. Beds are designated according to the level of care (Intensive, Specialty Basic, Crisis/Respite or any combination of these). The differences in these treatment modes is reflected in the staff component and the estimated time needed to achieve independent living.

*Intensive* - Characterized by a high staff-to-client ratio, usually no less than one staff person for two clients, 24 hours a day, and a one-to-one ratio in times of high activity (e.g., mealtimes). Specialized programming including medical, psychiatric, behavioral, vocational, social, and recreational services and substance abuse treatment are available.

*Specialty Residential Services* - A moderately staffed, supportive living arrangement designed to provide services to clients with special needs, such as dually diagnosed persons (those with both a mental illness and a substance abuse disorder), or clients involved in the criminal justice system. These services are provided to clients who require intensive 24-hour care over a long period of time (one year or more).

*Basic Residential Services* - Minimally staffed, with at least one qualified staff available at all times, these services are designed for clients needing a higher level of care than could be provided by a Mobile Treatment Team (MTT).

*Crisis/Respite Care* - short-term or periodic care for clients experiencing a crisis but not in need of hospital care, this facility is also used to provide periodic relief to usual care givers.

## **Department of Health**

The Division of Substance Abuse in the Rhode Island Department of Health funds a broad range of community based residential facilities for individuals with a dependence on drugs and/or alcohol. One program provides detoxification at two sites.

Except for detoxification, which is short-term (as little as three days), other services are long-term and may require treatment for up to six months. Treatment is offered at halfway houses. Typically, halfway houses offer room and board and some rehabilitative services during the period when the patient is trying to readjust in order to re-enter society. All programs that are licensed to provide drug and/or alcohol treatment services are required to employ specially trained certified clinical staff.

Residential program services are provided via contracts with private, nonprofit agencies. Some programs include an education component and most offer counseling services to families of patients. There were eighteen residential facilities with 386 beds in eleven different communities in 1995 (Table 421-4(06)).

## **Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)**

DCYF serves a population ranging from infancy to 21 years old. Programs meet the needs of youth that may be abused and/or neglected, dependent, emotionally disturbed, wayward, or delinquent. There were 63 community residences operating in 21 cities and towns in 1995 (see Table 421-4(06)). One-third of the residences were in Providence.

All facilities must be licensed by DCYF and also pass a health inspection. Facilities may be described as follows:

*Emergency Shelters-* These offer short-term placement, usually 45-90 days, and are designed for immediate crisis use.

*Group Homes-* These serve seven to twelve youngsters in need of placement. They attempt to create a home-like environment in a small group setting. These programs are located in residential settings and use community schools and other resources.

*Residential Care Facilities-* These serve thirteen or more children and are self-contained in that they offer both educational and clinical services.

*Supervised Apartment Living-* These are for youth over sixteen years of age. The usual setting is four youth residing in an apartment with a live-in counselor. This program prepares clients for independent living by offering health care, education, personal and social development, vocational training, recreation, and life skills development.



## **Table 421-4 (06)**

**Is located on the web separately and  
can be printed from that location.**

## **Emergency/Transitional Housing**

According to a 1996 report commissioned by the research committee of the Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project, 4,350 clients received emergency housing services from 21 different Rhode Island providers during the fiscal year ending July 1, 1996. More than 150,000 "bed nights" were provided to these clients, who were served by both emergency shelters and domestic violence shelters. The preponderance of those who sought shelter did so for economic and family reasons. On average, clients spent five and one-half weeks residing in emergency shelter. The principal reasons cited for seeking shelter were lack of income and/or lack of employment.

There were 497 shelter beds available statewide in 1995. This was down slightly from the 580 slots counted in 1992, the first year this agency tabulated shelter bed slots. Most shelter beds (56 percent) were located in the state's Metropolitan Core. East Bay had 13.9 percent and Northern Rhode Island, another 11.7 percent.

As of 1997 there were also twelve transitional housing complexes located throughout the State (totaling 274 units). These non-profit operated complexes are for formerly homeless households receiving extended social services while attempting to re-enter the job market and/or secure adequate and affordable housing. Residents may live in them for various time periods of up to two years depending on the criteria established by the non-profit agency. The Traveler's Aid Society of Rhode Island currently operates the largest transitional housing complex, the Crossroads (57 units), in North Kingstown. The second largest is McAuley House with 55 units.

### **4-3-3 Assisted Living Complexes**

While "assisted living" is sometimes used as a general term to define subsidized housing, in recent times it has taken on a more specific meaning. Assisted Living Facilities -- sometimes known as Residential Care Facilities -- occupy a halfway niche between independent living apartments as found in subsidized housing facilities, and traditional nursing home care. These facilities serve to delay or forestall completely the need for more costly nursing home care by offering support services that allow residents to live on their own, preserving a degree of independence that would not be possible in a nursing home. A variety of health and housekeeping services are provided.

The R.I. Department of Health licenses these facilities. F1 licensure is for residents deemed not capable of self preservation in an emergency because of physical mobility limitations or judgmental ability. F2 licensure is for residents who are capable in an emergency. A second level of licensure is based on medical needs. M1 licensure is for residents who need someone to administer medications to them; M2 is for those who can self-administer and may only need simple assistance such as reminding. There were 58 assisted living facilities with 2,175 beds operating in Rhode Island as of 1998. They can be found in eighteen cities and towns (Table 421-4(07)). Assisted living is a growing service. In 1995, there were 1,373 beds; this was a 58 percent increase in only three years.

**Table 421-4(07)**  
**RESIDENTIAL CARE/ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES**  
**BY CITY AND TOWN IN R.I.: 1998**

<b>City/Town</b>	<b>Number of Facilities</b>	<b>Number of Beds</b>
<b>Barrington</b>	---	---
<b>Bristol</b>	---	---
<b>Burrillville</b>	1	18
<b>Central Falls</b>	2	45
<b>Charlestown</b>	---	---
<b>Coventry</b>	2	87
<b>Cranston</b>	---	---
<b>Cumberland</b>	---	---
<b>East Greenwich</b>	1	56
<b>East Providence</b>	5	127
<b>Exeter</b>	---	---
<b>Foster</b>	1	14
<b>Glocester</b>	---	---
<b>Hopkinton</b>	---	---
<b>Jamestown</b>	---	---
<b>Johnston</b>	3	116
<b>Lincoln</b>	---	---
<b>Little Compton</b>	---	---
<b>Middletown</b>	1	104
<b>Narragansett</b>	---	---
<b>Newport</b>	---	---
<b>New Shoreham</b>	---	---
<b>North Kingstown</b>	---	---
<b>North Providence</b>	3	89
<b>North Smithfield</b>	---	---
<b>Pawtucket</b>	9	159
<b>Portsmouth</b>	---	---
<b>Providence</b>	9	542
<b>Richmond</b>	---	---
<b>Scituate</b>	---	---
<b>Smithfield</b>	3	280
<b>South Kingstown</b>	---	---
<b>Tiverton</b>	1	20
<b>Warren</b>	4	66
<b>Warwick</b>	8	259
<b>Westerly</b>	2	99
<b>West Greenwich</b>	---	---
<b>West Warwick</b>	1	8
<b>Woonsocket</b>	2	86
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>2175</b>

**Source:** R.I. Department of Health, Division of Facilities  
Regulation, August 1998

## **Part 421.5 STATE HOUSING PLAN IMPLEMENTATION PROPOSALS**

### **5-1 INTRODUCTION - A Housing Planning Primer**

The first Statewide Housing Plan was published in 1978 and adopted by the State Planning Council in March 1979. Titled the *State Housing Plan*, it established state goals and policies for housing, which were to be used as a checklist in evaluating proposals under the federally mandated A-95 intergovernmental review process circular.

At that time, housing proposals that sought a federal subsidy were required to undergo a review procedure that weighed local factors impinging on the decision to construct such residential dwellings, and it was thought that Statewide Planning, which hosted and staffed this review process, could influence the location and type of housing that would be constructed. The *State Housing Plan* divided the state into six housing market areas and developed a formula to be used to parcel out projects. The formula measured relative job availability, available acreage suitable for housing construction, the number of unassisted needy households, the percentage of existing housing in that area, and the percentage of all assisted existing housing in that area.

The planning premise was sound and eminently defensible. Evenhanded distribution would site housing where the jobs were and where the available land was; it would dispense assistance to communities proportionally and not overly burden areas with large numbers of low income people with the attendant infrastructure and service costs inherent in hosting subsidized households. But it did not work. The A-95 review process was reactive; completed proposals were submitted for review. The process did not generate proposals. Housing developers were never approved or turned down because of housing market location, and this distribution scheme came to naught.

The distribution scheme was not the sole focus of the 1978 plan. It was notable for documenting housing problems and advancing a variety of detailed counter measures to attack each issue:

#### **1) Deteriorating Neighborhoods and Substandard and Abandoned Housing**

Ten recommendations, ranging from rearranged funding priorities to more vigilant code violation prosecution and developer incentives were suggested; neighborhood-based activities were especially encouraged.

#### **2) Involuntary Concentration of Black and Other Minority Households**

Census findings showed minorities concentrated in the state's metropolitan core, just one of the 6 housing market areas. Twenty-five recommendations to all branches of government, lending institutions and community groups sought commitment to non-discriminatory practices.

**3) New Home Prices Relative to Income**

New home purchasing costs, including interest, had increased sharply in proportion to income. A number of cost-saving construction strategies were advanced to decelerate housing cost increases.

**4) Rapid Rise in Housing Operating Costs Relative to Income**

Ancillary housing costs ----insurance, repair, property taxes, and utility costs----were responsible for a good part of the increase in the cost of homeownership. More than thirty recommendations leveled at government and the private sector were suggested to counter these phenomena.

**5) Shortage of Affordable Decent Housing for Low and Moderate Income Families with Children**

The gap between rental housing costs and income was the core of this problem. This recommendation noted the trend of a growing number of households relative to population growth; a trend that continues to this day as the number of single parent households grows. A low vacancy rate also contributed to this problem, as did a trend toward constructing more expensive rental units. Large renter families were faced with a dearth of rental options.

Several recommendations urged all sectors to coordinate in increasing housing for low-income families.

**6) Displacement of Low and Moderate Income Households**

The report forecast a “middle class rediscovery” of the inner city that would displace low-income persons during the next fifteen years.

Except for some isolated neighborhoods, this prediction has so far failed to materialize, at least in an amount sufficient to offset the middle class flight that besets Rhode Island’s cities.

**7) Inappropriate Residential Development Patterns**

An outdated zoning enabling act and the related inability of cities and towns to regulate development were pointed out as leading causes of inappropriate development. The high-energy costs of low density residential development “sprawl” surfaced as a problem in this section.

The zoning enabling act has since been overhauled and cities and towns have the necessary authority to regulate development, but the issue of “sprawl” has resurfaced, redefined in terms of quality of life and conservation of resources and open space.

## **8) Current and Anticipated Housing Problems Related to Demographic Change**

Population trends were analyzed in an effort to predict future housing needs. This examination correctly predicted that a reduced fertility rate would be a lesser factor than the trend toward family breakup in generating a growing number of smaller households.

More vigilant planning efforts were urged to stay on top of this development, but accurate household size counts are tied to the decennial census.

## **9) Ineffective Housing Planning and Problem Solving**

The lack of coordination and related fragmentation was decried, and inadequate information about the present housing database was also seen as a deterrent to good planning.

The *State Housing Plan* concluded by urging the development of a state-level Areawide Housing Opportunities Plan for the allocation of housing assistance between communities, but failed to identify a single responsible lead agency, choosing instead to list the three principal housing planning organizations of that time, The Rhode Island Housing & Mortgage Finance Corporation, the Rhode Island Department of Community Affairs (since disbanded) and the Statewide Planning Program.

The next housing plan, the *Areawide Housing Plan*, was issued in 1984, five years after adoption of the initial state housing plan. It answered the call of the initial housing plan by furthering the concept of assistance redistribution. Its purpose was to update and implement some components of the previous plan. Census data for 1980 was referenced to update forecasts made in the earlier plan. The implementation premise of the *Areawide Housing Plan* was the distribution of housing assistance at the substate level, utilizing “fair share” criteria, which the *Areawide* established. . At the time of publication, federal interest in allocation plans had waned, but the objectives of that earlier distribution methodology were continued using the new criteria.

Housing assistance was to be allocated based on the following decision factors:

1. Manufacturing growth
2. Number of manufacturing jobs
3. Percentage of state population
4. Available acreage for construction
5. Percentage of population in need of housing
6. Relative fiscal capacity
7. Percentage of minority population
8. Percentage of low-moderate income population
9. Percentage of existing federally assisted housing

This formula was to be applied to housing assistance plans prepared for HUD and was intended to serve as a basis for staff commentary on projects subject to A-95 clearinghouse review. The objectives of distributing assistance among the six housing market areas was to distribute low and moderate subsidized housing more equitably around the state.

Data updates were accompanied by a number of other findings that urged change, but these were not stated as recommendations, nor was there any announced intention to work towards adoption, except in a general sense. Among the findings were: relaxing of strict zoning and adopting site-related savings to reduce housing costs, cluster zoning and encouraging mobile and manufactured home allowances. Local zoning authorities were still stymied by an antiquated state zoning law, and this was again seen as an obstacle to sound local decision-making.

The *Areawide Housing Plan* was adopted as a guide plan element in November, 1984. The elaborate housing assistance distribution formula has not been employed to determine funding priorities to date.

Perhaps the most influential Housing Report issued by Statewide Planning was published in 1987. It was commissioned by the Governor in response to sharply increasing housing costs, which constituted a crisis situation for unsubsidized low and moderate income tenants, as the boom in housing market prices was passed on to tenants by owners of rental units in the form of sharply increased rental costs. For people on fixed incomes, this constituted a major problem.

Titled *The Housing Report of the Governor's Human Services Advisory Council*, it was issued in July 1987, and although it was never adopted as a guide plan element, many of its recommendations were put into place.

Three recommendations promoted rental affordability; five recommendations were intended to preserve and expand the state's inventory of subsidized affordable housing stock; and twelve recommendations specifically targeted housing needs of three "special-needs" populations: the elderly, the chronically physically and mentally disabled, and children and youth unable to remain in family settings.

Among the significant and innovative housing improvements stimulated by this report was the establishment of more than 600 state subsidized "Section 8" -type units, heightened security in certain elderly housing complexes, and the establishment of certain mortgage prepayment restrictions on Rhode Island's supply of subsidized rental housing. Also resulting from this report were a series of state grants to communities for the purpose of drafting affordable housing strategies. In many cases, these strategies resulted in the formation of non-profit housing organizations that continue to produce affordable units.

Notable among the many lesser housing publications issued by Statewide Planning are periodic housing data bases, listing of mobile home parks and inventories of subsidized housing by type and location.

## **Trends in Housing Recommendations**

All past housing plans call for recommendations in the same general topical areas:

**Planning**----better or more inclusive planning, including new organizational alignments and or structural changes or new responsibilities for existing governmental bodies to improve housing.

**Affordability**----measures to increase rental/ownership affordability.

**Development**---- measures to increase development of desired housing stock.

**Preservation**----strategies to preserve affordable housing stock and arrest deterioration of the current inventory, and/or displacement of needy persons from affordable housing.

**Access**----increasing the accessibility of various disadvantaged groups to necessary housing and shelter.

## **The Planning Context**

Previous sections of this plan employed statistical counts to illustrate the incidence of various housing problems. Such findings have been displayed in tabular form by city and town as well as in statewide totals wherever possible. Other sections sought to inventory and describe federal and state subsidy programs and incentive arrangements used to stimulate additional housing units and/or make existing units habitable and affordable to populations who could not otherwise afford them. Throughout, the plan focuses on rental housing and the needs of Rhode Islanders who need help in coping with costs and availability. While home ownership and private financing issues are certainly worthwhile public policy concerns, they are not the core of this report. The strategies and recommendations that follow are largely aimed at rental supply and demand and cost issues for various defined populations.

An effort was made throughout this planning process to take a snapshot of Rhode Island's housing needs and housing inventory at a point in time for which reliable statistical information was available, but it is readily acknowledged that these factors do not stand still. Subsidy programs are subject to annual appropriations and shelter needs vary accordingly. Interest rates, tax law, and bureaucratic realignments can and do play a part in the state's shifting housing dynamics. In fact, the circumstances surrounding the publication of this third major Statewide Planning housing study are grossly different from the environment that was present when previous plans were enacted.

For the first time, Rhode Island's housing programs have a central administrative reference point. The Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission (RIHRC) was established during the 1998 legislative session. Its mission is to provide housing opportunities for all Rhode Islanders, to maintain the quality of housing in Rhode Island, and to coordinate and make effective the housing opportunities of the agencies and subdivisions of the state.



## **Purposes of the Commission**

- (a) To develop and promulgate state policies and plans for housing and performance measures for housing programs established pursuant to state law.
- (b) To coordinate activities among state agencies and political subdivisions pertaining to housing.
- (c) To promote the stability of and quality of life in communities and neighborhoods.
- (d) To provide opportunities for safe, sanitary, decent, adequate, and affordable housing in Rhode Island.
- (e) To encourage public-private partnerships that foster the development, maintenance, and improvement of housing and housing conditions, especially for low-and moderate-income people.
- (f) To foster and support nonprofit organizations, including community development corporations and their associations and intermediaries that are engaged in providing housing and housing-related services.
- (g) To encourage and support partnerships between institutions of higher education and neighborhoods to develop and retain quality, health housing, and sustainable communities.

Just as major changes have taken place at the state level since the creation of the last Statewide Planning housing plan, there are also vastly different housing responsibilities in place at the local level. Local zoning and land use regulations have come under scrutiny as a result of The Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act of 1988. This law required each of Rhode Island's thirty-nine cities and towns to generate and adopt a comprehensive approach to development by addressing the land use and housing issues affecting them. At this writing, all Rhode Island Communities have comprehensive plans in place, although not all plans have gained state acceptance. A further provision of the law is that updates of housing elements can be expected every five years, thereby assuring regular local scrutiny of housing needs.

Another significant law requires communities to address the presence of low and moderate income housing within their boundaries. The Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (R.I.G.L. 45-53) establishes a 10 percent minimum threshold for low and moderate income housing units in each city and town, excepting those communities with at least 5000 occupied rental units when those rental units comprise 25 percent or more of the total housing in that community. Communities with less than this threshold amount---twenty-nine as of August, 1999---are subject to the jurisdiction of The State Housing Appeals Board, a statewide zoning board of review which is empowered to reconsider local zoning denials and override them in certain circumstances.

When the last housing guide plan was formulated, environmental concerns were a force on the Rhode Island scene, but formal coalescence of "anti-sprawl" forces had yet to take place. Earlier housing plans and several associated land use plans also issued by Statewide Planning all pointed to the dangers that are now a central tenet of the Smart Growth forces---to guard against a future where the state's remaining undeveloped privately held acreage is simply carved up into buildable house lots with a single family residence plunked down on each square. With the emergence of organizations extolling "Smart Growth," there is a heightened awareness of the hazards of continuing urban flight and the associated depopulation of downtowns and village centers. There is also a welcome advocacy for making urban areas more livable by pressing for quality of life issues. Smart Growth advocates bring issues like clean water, air quality, open space planning and associated livability issues to bear on the quest for adequate housing. And

they form a natural ally for reinvestment in older city and town centers---areas where residential housing and related infrastructure are most in need of public and private attention.

## **5-2 STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The state and local communities need to conduct careful periodic assessments of housing needs, with special emphasis on the needs of those who need governmental assistance to secure decent housing -- very low-income households and special population groups. Timely, regularly compiled information should be used to develop planning goals and serve as the basis for promoting and implementing change.

Such data should serve to support a listing of priorities which will reduce or eliminate adverse housing conditions and increase the number of affordable units for those households most in need. The most pressing housing problems relative to their impact on people's lives are: 1) a lack of shelter arrangements matching client needs and supporting a transition to more permanent shelter, 2) substandard and/or overcrowded living arrangements, 3) unmet housing needs of special population groups, 4) discriminatory residential housing practices, 5) an insufficient variety of affordable housing units, and 6) an insufficient variety of different types of units.

These recommendations are offered with the recognition of the central role of the new Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission and the expectation that prioritization and agency assignment may alter as the Commission proceeds to refine its work program. The Commission is in a unique position to foster coordination and minimize duplication of effort amongst the various entities identified.

### **5-2-1 Emergency, Term, and Permanent Shelter for Vulnerable Populations**

#### **Recommendations:**

1. The Rhode Island Department of Human Services should review emergency and transitional housing support services to seek ways to reduce the need for emergency housing by chronic shelter users.
2. Statewide Planning should periodically review local data on the needs of the homeless and those vulnerable to becoming homeless and then work with the Rhode Island Housing Resource Commission to assess the provision of assistance.
3. Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation should give priority funding to agencies trying to establish a comprehensive approach (outreach and assessment, emergency shelter services, transitional housing, supportive services and permanent housing) for the homeless.
4. Local communities should make zoning changes and provide support for the conversion of suitable unused commercial buildings for an adequate stock of boarding house and single room occupancy units for very low-income individuals.
5. Court administrators on the district court level should either establish formal mediation centers as an adjunct to the court system or utilize housing specialists to provide informal mediation and investigative housing services for the court. Such a program could help keep low-income households from becoming homeless, or powerless in protecting homeownership or rental rights.

## **5-2-2 Housing Rehabilitation and Code Enforcement**

### State Level Recommendations:

1. Statewide Planning should work with other agencies to conduct periodic housing quality surveys and quantify rehabilitation needs. State uniform building permit data, minimum housing code enforcement data and Community Development Block Grant Program funding data should be used to periodically estimate the extent of local residential rehabilitation.
2. Statewide Planning should review state legislation on minimum housing and make recommendations to the Governor and the legislature on enacting a statewide uniform housing code patterned after the latest International Property Maintenance Code. Other changes should also be recommended to bring the law into conformity with other existing state housing law.
3. The State Building Code Commission should recommend that the State adopt a revised version of the New Jersey Rehabilitation Subcode (N.J.A.C. 5:23-6).
4. Statewide Planning should make the upgrading of deteriorated neighborhoods (commonly known as dis-investment areas) an important inter-governmental review consideration when federal/state funding is sought for subsidized housing in Rhode Island communities
5. Making housing units “lead safe” is a high priority as demonstrated by several large state appropriations and a unique Medicaid waiver to direct public funds for that purpose. The large number of older housing units currently in use and the costs of making these units “lead safe” point to the need for a priority system to be established by the Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission to attack this problem to get the maximum public advantage from available funding.

Special emphasis on the five communities with the largest amount of lead-based paint (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Newport, Providence and Woonsocket) is needed. These communities account for approximately 37 percent of all occupied units with lead paint in Rhode Island.

6. The Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission and the Community Development Block Grant Program should initiate a special pilot program of “limited time” funding for systematic housing code enforcement in certain areas that are determined to be in a critical state of housing dis-investment.
7. In situations where vandalism may destroy abandoned or foreclosed structures that could be used for subsidized housing Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation should consider obtaining title, securing the properties and seeking non-profit developers to purchase and rehabilitate the buildings.
8. The State should support local historic preservation activities to increase public awareness of older housing and promote the rehabilitation of historic housing or housing in historically designated neighborhoods as an affordable housing resource.

### Local Level Recommendations:

1. Local communities should consider property tax incentives to encourage housing and neighborhood maintenance.

2. Local communities should strengthen their local minimum housing code enforcement procedures, and fairly but vigorously enforce housing code requirements.
3. Local communities should consider instituting a pre-occupancy inspection program for older residential units, similar to a program in effect in Warwick.
4. Local communities should emphasize rehabilitation of deteriorated or substandard housing as a primary activity when setting goals in comprehensive plan housing elements and in developing Community Development Block Grant Program funding plans.
5. Local communities should emphasize sewer and water service improvements, police and fire protection, and the upgrading of other public facilities and services in declining and deteriorating areas to accompany residential rehabilitation plans.
6. Local communities should establish cooperative agreements and/or extend targeted financial support to local non-profit housing developers involved with rehabilitating substandard housing
7. Local communities should prioritize housing improvement grant/loan programs in deteriorated areas.
8. Local planning agencies should keep a current inventory of abandoned and severely dilapidated housing and work with other local governmental and non-profit agencies to see that such housing is rehabilitated or demolished as warranted.

### **5-2-3 Special Population Housing Needs**

1. Statewide Planning, in cooperation with the Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission, should conduct a survey of housing problems of special population groups. Such groups would include the physically and mentally disabled and others needing special living supports.
2. The State should continue to encourage communities to promote housing opportunities for special population groups via local comprehensive plans.
3. Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation and other agencies should support the use of McKinney Act funds to obtain permanent housing for homeless people, especially those with disabilities.

### **5-2-4 Equal Opportunity**

For a variety of reasons – economic disparity, discrimination or historical patterns of inequality – Blacks and Hispanics have a significantly lower representation in homeownership and reside for the most part (80 percent) in the inner city neighborhoods of six of the state’s cities. According to the last census, Blacks and Hispanics made up 8.5 percent of the state’s population, but only 2.2 percent of the state’s homeowners.

Based on disproportionate ownership figures and other information concerning housing inequities the following data collecting and review procedure should be conducted to foster equal opportunities in housing for all minority populations:

1. A fair housing testing program conducted by the R.I. Commission for Human Rights, was abandoned several years ago due to a lack of funding. This program should be reinstituted as a means of combating discrimination in rental property.
2. The 2000 census should be carefully analyzed to measure the current status of minority homeownership in Rhode Island and determine changes from the previous census. Lending institutions and the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation should be cognizant of the disproportionate concentration of minority households and institute programs to expand ownership opportunities.

### **5-2-5 Affordability**

1. The State should provide monetary incentives and/or technical support for courses and training for elected local community officials, and planning and zoning administrators regarding affordable housing and responsibilities in meeting mandated state housing objectives. Such training can demonstrate that affordable housing can be attractive and serve as an asset to the host community.
2. The Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation should encourage the establishment of non-profit housing cooperatives (either single or multi-family housing units) for low and moderate-income households. Housing cooperatives impart a sense of ownership and can serve households that would otherwise lack the means to purchase housing.
3. Communities should consider appropriate zoning changes to allow smaller residential lot sizes as infill for “built-up” areas where there are adequate public utilities and services.

4. Communities should encourage increased residential construction and conversion of existing units for cooperatives, condominiums, and attached housing, when such units will serve low-income households.
5. Communities should make wider use of planned unit and cluster developments to increase affordability where appropriate.
6. *Entitlement* communities under the Community Development Block Grant Program should make vacant “building” and “lot” homesteading programs an affordable housing initiative.
7. The Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission should sponsor periodic statewide housing conferences and workshops to promote information sharing on such topics as state housing program policies, and innovative ways to lower housing costs to stimulate action to resolve housing need issues. Such conferences should target the financial community, providers, developers and key public officials.
8. Communities should be encouraged to earmark an adequate amount of land for the construction of multi-family housing; especially those towns and cities that do not currently meet the 10 percent low-moderate income housing goal as established by the RI Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (RIGL 45-53).

#### **5-2-6 Availability**

1. The Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission should encourage the development of low cost housing options such as “in-law” apartments, manufactured housing, homesteading opportunities, subsidized “self help” construction, cooperative housing, and the conversion of obsolete commercial/industrial buildings into condominiums through the use of federal financing.
2. The Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation should establish non-profit housing cooperatives (using either single or multi-family housing units) to foster homeownership, especially in unique situations, where other efforts have not been successful.
3. Statewide Planning should advocate for planned housing growth, focusing development in existing centers of communities and areas planned for development according to local comprehensive plans.
4. Communities should eliminate zoning regulations and development procedures that have the sole aim of slowing development or excluding certain types of housing unless over-whelming reasons can be provided, (such as a finding that a state of residential “build-out” has been reached).

### **5-3 BALANCED HOUSING GROWTH**

#### **5-3-1 Urban Communities**

Urban centers contain the oldest and most deteriorated housing. They are made up of stick-built multi-story tenements and are often beset with deteriorated conditions and lead paint hazards. There is an undeniable relationship between middle-class abandonment of the older cities and the pressure for development sprawl that is swallowing up the rural areas. This

redistribution of the state's population and the subsequent housing problems that occur are at the forefront of controlling sprawl.

The housing strategy for the major cities should include: the preservation or rehabilitation of existing housing stock to arrest blight; decreasing the unit density in selected areas to improve land use functions; providing affordable housing for a variety of special needs groups; and stabilizing residential property taxes. At the same time communities are demolishing deteriorated and abandoned dwellings they should seek ways to build needed low income residential units through vacant lot "in-fill" programs. A wide range of housing choices are necessary to match the different economic capacities of city residents.

### **5-3-2 Suburban Communities**

Historically, suburban communities have found it difficult to control their destinies in the face of development pressures. Suburban communities provide a mix of commercial services, residential space, transportation routes, and other social, economic, and land use functions for contiguous areas. It is important for these communities to assess functions that are often thrust on them by adjoining urban centers and direct these "service" type roles to benefit local needs while also considering the greater inter-community and regional situation. The rapid growth of many suburban towns and cities requires balancing many types of competing development, and the difficulty is doing so in an equitable way. Suburban communities could benefit by thinking, acting and planning together on a regional basis to work out development issues.

### **5-3-3 Rural Communities**

The very same attractions that make rural residencies appealing – open spaces, rural landscapes, low taxes – are jeopardized and placed at risk by obsolete planning practices.

Rural communities generally lack an economic base to support a large influx of new residents, and the existing utility service infrastructure is usually confined to village areas and areas bordered by existing roads.

Controlled development is key to preserving existing open spaces and arresting the irretrievable loss of R.I.'s remaining farm lands, fields and forests. But a "no growth" policy is indefensible. Rural communities need a growth strategy that respects natural resources and channels growth constructively.

Rural communities need fair and equitable growth plans that allow "phased-in" residential development coordinated with the expansion of utilities and services from central village areas or areas with the greatest population densities. Such growth plans should result from or be part of the local comprehensive plan housing and land use elements.

### **Recommendations for Communities**

1. Increase residential densities in specific areas to allow cost reductions in community infrastructure and maintenance, with the added benefits of preserving open space and natural assets in other areas.
2. Housing development should be primarily focused where utilities and other infrastructure improvements already exist and secondarily, where it is most feasible to extend such services.
3. Provide incentives for "smart growth" through community revitalization and reinvestment.

4. Promote regional cooperation to control sprawl.
5. Provide housing in locations convenient to other activities and existing facilities.
6. Continue to encourage the “scattered site” approach when developing public or assisted housing as an alternative to large multi-family, single site construction.
7. Use local comprehensive plans for guidance in making decisions concerning the implementing of contractor impact fees or mandatory dedications. The intended results of such requirements should be to provide general benefits to the community and specific benefits to the residents of the new homes.
8. Support residential units in mixed-use projects in urban centers.
9. Preserve open spaces by encouraging more compact residential development in previously developed areas and preserving adjacent open spaces.
10. Promote home ownership in urban areas by encouraging urban investment.